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OO RUEHCHI
DE RUEHBK #2569 2801023
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 071023Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8544
INFO RUEHVN/AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE PRIORITY 5753
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 7124
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2165

UNCLAS BANGKOK 002569

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR PRM/ANE, EAP/MLS
GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF PHUM SMIG TH LA](#)

SUBJECT: LAO HMONG IN PETCHABUN: TENSIONS FLARE IN CAMP,
BUT NO SERIOUS INJURIES REPORTED

REF: A. BANGKOK 2042

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 2041

[1](#)1. (SBU) On October 6 at approximately 7:30 pm local (Bangkok) time, a small group of Royal Thai Armed Forces (RTARF) soldiers in the military-run camp for Lao Hmong in Petchabun fired their weapons in the air to disperse a crowd. Employees of an NGO in the camp described hearing (but not witnessing first-hand) 4-5 minutes of firing, building in crescendo from apparent side arms discharging to bursts of automatic weapons. By the end of day on October 7, no injured Hmong or soldiers had been brought to the clinic overseen by the NGO Catholic Organization for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR). COERR employees were able to enter the Petchabun camp as usual on the morning of October 7, and reported that the situation was "calm" with no evidence of additional troop movements.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Two versions of the events leading up to the shooting incident - the first since the camp was opened in July 2007- were offered by the Lao Hmong detainees, and by the RTARF. A Hmong leader in the Petchabun facility told RefCoord that the RTARF entered the camp and attempted to arrest a 62-year old "ex-CIA fighter" for deportation to Laos, and that the soldiers were quickly surrounded by outraged neighbors. Feeling threatened, warning shots were fired in the air, and the RTARF departed the camp without the intended arrestee or injuries to either side. Senior army commanders in Petchabun were not willing to discuss the incident with post, but soldiers involved told COERR that a routine patrol in the camp had been followed by a group of Hmong teenagers. The patrol searched the teenagers' belongings, and discovered a knife. An attempt to arrest the teenager quickly drew a large crowd, shots fired were over the Hmong's heads, and the patrol retreated to the camp entrance. The RTARF claimed a scuffle with members of the crowd occurred which resulted in minor injuries to two soldiers. COERR described the mood of the RTARF as "angry" the day after the incident.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Comment. Tensions are likely to continue to increase in the Petchabun camp as RTARF-organized "voluntary" returns gradually drain the camp population, and a core group of Hmong unwilling to repatriate to Laos becomes exposed. The Royal Thai Government (RTG) itself estimated in a January 2008 accounting that about 800-1,000 Hmong will not want to return. Assuming that none of this group was repatriated in the interim, the RTG's conservative guess suggests that about one-quarter of the current population of 4,000-plus remaining Hmong will resist any effort to move them.

ENTWISTLE